

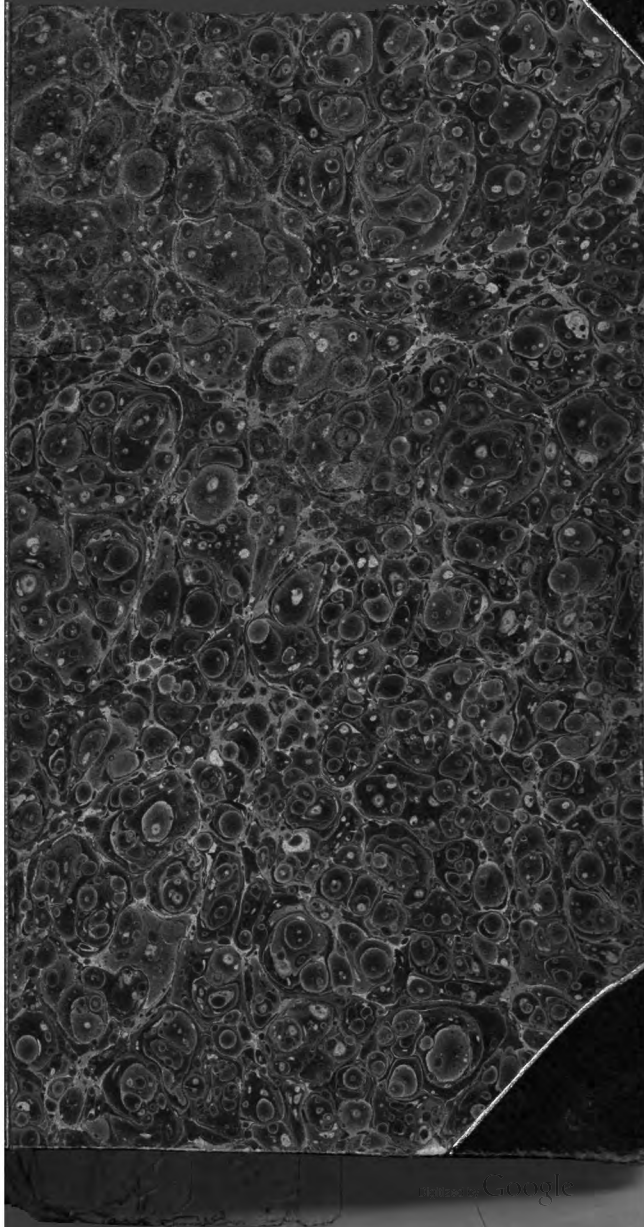
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A

WORD TO ALL ON  
LENT.

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LONDON:  
WILLIAM SKEFFINGTON, 163, PICCADILLY.  
1862.  
[*Price Two Pence.*]

**F. Shoberl, Printer, 37, Dean Street, Soho, W.**



## A WORD TO ALL ON LENT.

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The season of Lent is again approaching with all its holy thoughts and solemn duties. As Christians we are all invited at this time to keep this great Spring-fast,<sup>1</sup> even as our Master Himself fasted forty days in the Wilderness of Judea.

The call is for all people. If you are rich or powerful, the call is for *you*. You are told to "take up the Cross" and "follow the Lamb." You are told to abstain from much that your wealth can afford, and to lay a larger share than usual at your Saviour's feet, dedicating it to His service. If you are poor and lowly, the call is for *you*. Your Lord and Master allows *you* also the honour of doing something for His sake, and of following His great example. According to your abilities, then, I would urge you, tread, this Lent, in your Saviour's footsteps, that, when it is over, it may leave you nearer to Him, and more fit for the glorious Mansion that He is gone to prepare in Heaven.

<sup>1</sup> The word "Lent" means Spring; and this fast is so-called, because it falls in the Spring of the year.

That you may the more clearly see what is your duty at this time, and what the work that Christ allows and would have you to do, I would ask you to go along with me in these few pages, first seeking that Divine Aid, which alone can bless even these few words to your soul's health.

The great work of our lives is our souls' salvation, which can be wrought only through Faith—that lively Faith which, looking to Christ alone for pardon, as the only foundation of our hope,<sup>1</sup> yet shows itself in good works since “Faith without works is dead.”<sup>2</sup> “Work out your own salvation,” says the Apostle Paul, “with fear and trembling.”<sup>3</sup> But since we are by nature so prone to evil “that we cannot always stand upright,” our Church, who carefully watches her children, and provides for their infirmities, has appointed days and seasons in which to bring before us the different circumstances of our Saviour's life in all their force, and the lessons that He in His Holy Word has taught us. Perhaps the most solemn season in the whole year is this one of Lent upon which we are now entering; we are led, in the early part of it, to consider our Lord's fasting in the wilderness, His temptation and victory; and in the last week, we are reminded of His passion in the garden of Gethsemane, “His precious death and burial.” What can be more fitted to bring us to a heart-felt contrition for those sins, which caused Him so much suffering, and to stir us up to a life of devotion

<sup>1</sup> “Therefore being justified by Faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” Romans, v., 1. See also I. Timothy i., 1.—“Jesus Christ, which is our Hope.”

<sup>2</sup> James ii., 20.

<sup>3</sup> Phil. ii., 12.

to His service? But to go deeper into the matter, for it is not enough to speak or think vaguely on such a subject, or to dream of self-sacrifice, or to "take up the Cross" in fancy only, we must look to ourselves, each one searching into the depth of his heart, to drive out whatever savours of sin.

You, who have taken up this paper, have done so, perhaps, with a real desire of knowing where your duty lies; or, possibly, you may have done it from a wish to while away a few leisure moments; or, perhaps, because you were asked to read it; or, may be, for some other reason. But, whatever be your motive, believe me, in *this* is another call for you to "take up the Cross and follow" Christ. Here is an invitation to deny yourself, to go with your Lord into the wilderness and into the garden, and to follow Him even to the foot of the Cross. Surely you will not refuse so Divine a call!

The great work of Lent is repentance. Not but that we are in need at all times of repentance. Day by day we are taught to say, "forgive us our trespasses," and "we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep." But it is in consideration for our weakness, and to aid us in our endeavours after holiness, that the forty days are given us, as a special time for bewailing our sins, and drawing near to God.

To help us in this our work, different exercises are recommended to us; such as prayer, fasting and abstinence. You may say that fasting does not belong to the poor; that they who live on scanty means, cannot be expected to fast. But surely in this you are narrow-

ing the idea of fasting. If you really live so low that you cannot safely lessen your daily food, yet is there no *pleasure* you can give up, which, though not wrong in itself, may become your idol, if you give it the time which, at this special season, God asks for Himself? Cannot you abstain from some little pleasure for His sake, or devote a portion of your time to some work for Him, and so help to wean yourself from this world.

Or if your life be absolutely devoid of pleasure; if you earn a scanty living by dint of hard labour with no respite from your toil, yet is there nothing left for you to do, to prove your love to Him? Yes, surely! even *you* may offer a sacrifice of that which costs you much—even the gratification of your carnal will and affections. Perhaps there is some sin—a trifling one you may call it, though, indeed, no sin can be trifling—or some little secret fault that you allow to lurk in your heart, or are in the habit of committing; and which it would cost a hard struggle to give up. Oh! do, I entreat you, take up the sling and the stone, and, as David slew Goliath, so, trusting in God, slay your sin, and allow it no more to have dominion over you. Or it may be that some earthly affection has too strong a hold upon your heart, taking the seat there, where God ought to reign supreme. Perhaps it is a cloud between you and Heaven. Perhaps, even if innocent in itself, it may be hiding the things of God from you. Some one person it may be, whether husband or wife, child or friend, to whom you give too much thought, too much care, and even an undue share of love; or a love unsanctified by that God from whom you received

the gift you so highly prize. Or it may be some pleasure or pursuit which engrosses your thoughts so that you forget the command, "My son, give me thine heart."<sup>1</sup> Oh! beware how you allow your hopes of Heaven to be fettered by anything worldly. This surely is a time to take heed and to "watch unto prayer." Lose no time. Begin your Lenten work at once; for the forty days are not too much for so vast an undertaking. First, call in the aid of the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts, that you may not judge too lightly of your faults. I can think of no better prayer for you to use than that of the Psalmist: "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm cxxxix., 23, 24. Then search into the very depth of your heart; try your most secret thoughts and feelings; and root out every evil thought. Cast your every sin at your Saviour's feet; ay, and crucify it on His Cross.

This cannot be the work of an hour or a day. It must be a continual striving that will gain the mastery:—seize this sacred opportunity. Let Satan see that you are resolved to fight on the Lord's side. "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you."<sup>2</sup>

But it is not only of actual sins that I would speak. There are sins of omission, which are written down in God's book against us, as well as sins of commission. Recall to your mind the many times when you have "left undone things which you ought to have done."

<sup>1</sup> Prov., xxiii., 26.

<sup>2</sup> James, iv., 7.

Think of time, or money, or abilities wasted ; think of every idle moment ; think of warnings slighted, blessings unacknowledged, prayers neglected, communions little valued, if not wholly rejected. Think of all these things and say, have you not abundant cause for tears ? The Blood of Christ alone can atone for all these sins. Oh ! think of what He endured for your sake.

It may be, you are blameless in some of these matters, and that yet there is much to deplore, for “who-soever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, if you throw away any of the means of grace, where will you look for safety ? Ask yourself, then, “Have I used every opportunity of drawing nigh unto God ? Have I sought Him in prayer both public and private ? Have I sought Him in His Holy Word ? And, especially, have I sought Him in the Eucharistic Feast ?” *There*, be assured, if anywhere, you will find Him. In the consecrated Bread and Wine, Christ gives Himself to the faithful, to be their most precious Food and Sustenance. If you have never yet partaken of this Heavenly Feast, I urge you, delay no longer. For, in truth, you know not what it is that you refuse. You reject the very “Bread” which came down from Heaven, to give “Life unto the world ;”<sup>2</sup> you reject the very Lord of Life Himself, when He most graciously offers to come into your soul. For “the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion”—*i.e.*, the communication or imparting—“of the Blood of Christ ? the Bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ ?”<sup>3</sup> Surely,

<sup>1</sup> James, xi., 10.

<sup>2</sup> John, vi., 33.

<sup>3</sup> I. Cor., x., 16.

then, you will no longer put off so loving an invitation. Or, if you have been in the habit of occasionally communicating, why not do it oftener? Why ever turn your back upon the altar, and so refuse that "meat," in whose "strength" you might go even "unto the Mount of God?" Oh! try seriously this Lent to prepare yourself for a devout and frequent participation in the Sacred Feast. *This* is the table spread in the wilderness, where hungry souls may be refreshed; this is that Life-giving Food of which our Saviour says, that except we eat of It we have no Life in us.<sup>1</sup>

There is yet another point on which you should examine yourself. Perhaps you *are* in the habit of frequenting the services of the Church: you may even be strict in regard to them. Perhaps, too, your strictness is not from love of men's praise, or for the sake of appearance, but from a sense of duty. Perhaps you do not indulge in sinful thoughts, but lead a steady, sober, quiet, respectable life. And yet you may, "when weighed in the balance," be "found wanting." The *fear* of God may abide with you, but the *love* of God may yet not be deeply rooted in your heart. Possibly, you may even deplore your own coldness, and wish that you could feel the affection of a child towards your Heavenly Father. If this be your case, you can indeed have no fitter time than the season of Lent for your work. Meditate on the Life, and still more on the Passion and Death, of Christ. Think of the Love of the Father in sparing His Son; of the Son in dying for us; of the Holy Ghost in aiding the work of our

<sup>1</sup> John, vi., 53.

sanctification. And then think how little you deserve all this care, and surely your affections will be raised from earth to Heaven : you will realize something of the gratitude you owe to God, and will long to serve Him more faithfully. Your love will show itself in a sincere desire to fight manfully against His enemies, whether they assail you from without, or in your own heart ; and to promote His glory. You will long, too, to bring others into the Fold ; and, in your zeal for God's service, you will strive to win your fellow creatures to the right way by every hallowed means : by a meek and holy example, by your prayers, and by active exertions.

And now, dear reader, do not lay down this tract without counting the cost of such a work as I have proposed for you. Do not lay it down to forget my words. It may not be an easy task that I have sketched out ; but if you weigh it rightly, you will surely exclaim with your Lord : " What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? " <sup>1</sup> This, remember, *is* a call to *you*. You may heed it or not *now*. But the day will come (the last Great Day), when you will be reminded of this same call ; and it will assuredly tell either for or against you : *for* you, if now it rouse you to a greater devotion to God ; *against* you, if you cast away its warning, and fall back into careless habits.

The Spirit of God will not always strive with man : <sup>2</sup> take heed to His warnings now, I entreat you. ' Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are

<sup>1</sup> Matt., xvi., 26.

<sup>2</sup> See Gen., vi., 3.

seated unto the Day of Redemption.”<sup>1</sup> Urge yourself on to greater devotion to His service. Yours must be an active faith. Be not content to remain as you are, but be always aiming at perfection; always striving to obtain the mastery; laying “aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset” you,<sup>2</sup> seek by every means to follow the way of the Cross; for, “go where thou wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt, thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the Holy Cross.”<sup>3</sup>

If, indeed, you begin a system of actual self-denial this Lent, and carry it on secretly, humbly, contentedly, for the Love of God, rooting out, as far as possible, every inclination to sin from within you, you may well hope that when the Easter morning dawns, you will be prepared to share the joy of the Faithful, and to partake of the Great Feast of Love, which will be spread on the altar for you.

One word more. This life may, in one sense, be compared to Lent: and the Last Resurrection Day, to Easter.<sup>4</sup> What is this world but a place of trial to prepare us for the next?

Live, then, a life of watching, and striving, and prayer here; bear, for Christ’s sake, your own crosses with patience; and *in the strength of His Cross you shall conquer*. You shall overcome all the enemies of your salvation; even “principalities” and “powers, the

<sup>1</sup> Eph., iv., 30.      <sup>2</sup> Heb., xii., 1.      <sup>3</sup> Thomas à Kempis.

<sup>4</sup> “The Fast of Lent,” wrote St. Augustine many centuries since, “signifies this present troublesome life, and Easter signifies eternal happiness and rest.”

rulers of the darkness of the world, and spiritual wickedness in high places.”<sup>1</sup>

And then: oh, think of your reward!—a glorious and happy Easter in a brighter World; and a place at God's right Hand for evermore.

<sup>1</sup> Eph., vi., 12.

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**THE END.**

















